

Document No.

NO CHANGE in Class. ☐

☐ DECLASSIFIED

Class. CHANGED TO: TS S C

DDA Memo, 4 Apr 77

October 11, 1954

Auth: DDA REG. 77/1763

Date: SEp 77 By:

Director of Training

Briefing of the Wives of Agency Employees Assigned to Duty Overseas

1. Introduction. This is an informal memorandum, aimed at mentioning aspects of the problem which require exploration, and which can be later included in an action document. The area briefing of wives -- and other mature dependents -- is not the same as the briefing required for Agency employees for three reasons:

a. Wives cannot be presumed to have the same motivation for living abroad as their husbands. In fact, the only safe assumption is that a wife resents leaving American comforts and her family ties for life overseas. Hence, the briefing of wives must include morale building, instilling sound motivation and a sense of the importance of American missions abroad.

c. Agency wives are in a peculiarly delicate position, in that inadvertent disclosure of Agency connection can have serious repercussions undreamed of by the wives themselves. Much harm is done unintentionally by wives whose demeanor abroad makes them conspicuous or causes gossip through quite unintentional infractions of local social customs and taboos. Hence, it is vital to assure that they are prepared to accept the local mores, even when these appear painfully wrong according to American beliefs and standards.

2. Discussion. This problem is well recognized elsewhere.

b. American corporations doing business overseas have had long experience with this problem. For instance, I spent six months last year helping the [redacted] its program to promote specialization in Asiatic area studies on the part of qualified business and government employees. The most interesting single occasion of my six months experience was listening to a gathering of senior executives of a dozen large corporations discussing the training of overseas employees. The former head of the General Motors Export Company announced with brutal frankness that by far the greatest problem had been the employees' wives, of whom he complained that they antagonized the wives of the local businessmen, or ignored the native families entirely and associated solely with other Americans or Westerners. He said that the failure of the wives to adjust abroad was the reason assigned by a majority of employees for asking to be returned to the United States. The group all contributed stories on this theme.

25X1

One venture intended to help American business with this problem is the Thunderbird School of Foreign Trade, in Phoenix, where wives are included in all activities and the assumption is made that a young man planning a career in business overseas must include his wife in all phases of his training.

The most successful of the employee training programs devised by American business corporations is the elaborate one given to Aramco employees at Sidon, Lebanon. Aramco has recognized from the beginning of their operation in Arabia that they must continually work on the problem of training American employees to fit into the conditions imposed by the hot Arabian climate and the rigid, puritanical social atmosphere enforced in Moslem Saudi Arabia.

3. Recommendations. It is my basic recommendation that the problem should be acknowledged officially and steps be taken to prepare suitable briefings. Two types of briefings may be differentiated which I will call General Briefing and Country Briefing.

a. General Briefing. General Briefing covers topics applicable to all Agency wives and grown dependents going abroad which should concern itself with such matters as:

(1) Motivation and Morale. The reason why America has committed itself to such extensive diplomatic, military, economic aid and information programs abroad.

(2) The role of every official's wife and family as quasi-representatives of the United States, -- unofficially, but inevitably so regarded by the inhabitants.

(3) The importance of the objective view, of "See ourselves as others see us." A good item on this topic is the Defense Department's "A Pocket Guide to Anywhere" which asks GI's abroad to consider how they would like it if we had been all but destroyed in the war and an imaginary country named Atlantis, with the best will in the world, decided to pour aid and airstrips and occupation troops into our cities and country side, to help boaster us against a communist threat to our liberty.

(4) Standard regulations of concern to government employees overseas, on pay, promotion, travel, insurance, medical care, leave, housing, dependant's schooling etc.

b. Country Briefing. Country Briefing for wives and children should be aimed at informing them about the conditions they will be living in, both the physical surroundings and the psychological atmosphere. It should avoid mere academic discussion and theorizing on the political and economic structure of the country, and concentrate on the daily contacts between the American visitors and their resident hosts. It will include a variety of topics. Some of them can be dealt with briefly, others require more elaboration, depending on the area. Important topics:

(1) Post Report topics. Living conditions, climate, housing for Americans, sanitation, food.

(2) Form of government, especially where very different from our own, -- centralized, monarchical, dictatorial -- and general attitude of the people toward it. Local concept of "democracy," of elections, of the people's proper share in government.

(3) Social system. What castes or strata? What is the position of women? What jobs are open to women? Where may women be seen in public? Where go shopping? Where not go at night? Is the social code formal or informal? Is etiquette stiff or relaxed? What is the local view of women smoking in public, drinking or gambling in public? What is proper garb on the street, at beaches, in church? What is improper? What are approved greetings? When do you shake hands? Are any gestures especially approved or resented?

(4) Religious pattern. If a non-Christian country, what is attitude toward Christianity? How does religious belief influence daily life? What are the forms of respect toward clergy, nuns, teaching orders, etc. What are the religious holidays? What places, articles or animals are considered sacred? What are tabu or held to be unclean?

(5) Myths, heroes, celebrations, festivals.

(6) Servants. Local position in society, pay, privileges such as time-off, clothing supplied by employer, duties expected of house servants (such as marketing), duties not expected (such as driving car).

(7) Children. Local ideas about pregnancy, child birth, child raising. Superstitions, attitudes expected of mother, ideas about babies, about games and toys, about hygiene, about education, about baby-sitting.

(8) Foreigners. Local attitudes about strangers in general and Americans in particular. Diplomatic immunity, and its limitations. Attitude toward those who abuse it. Travel restrictions on aliens, permits and red tape. Export limitations.

(9) Markets, shopping, bargaining.

(10) Hospitality, entertaining and being entertained. Ceremonial gifts, personal presents, tips.

(11) Public entertainment, theaters, parks, swimming pools, dancing, race tracks.

(12) Transportation. Private cars and public vehicles.

4. Recommendations for Conduct of Briefings.

a. Whom to be briefed. This memorandum is limited to the briefing to be given to spouses and dependents of Agency employees mature enough to need it, appreciate it, and respond accordingly.

b. Who to brief. Formal briefing should be conducted by the joint efforts of the officer at each country desk best qualified by knowledge and experience to do so with the assistance of the Office of Training's specialists in the area, who will supply maps, printed materials, tape recordings and moving pictures whenever available. The briefing must be handled by some one who has the gift of imparting information and the enthusiasm for doing it. It cannot be done effectively by a man who is inarticulate, however knowledgeable, or by one who has never lived in the area, however well informed.

c. Time. One or two hour sessions every day for a week as part of the procedure of processing for travel overseas. Lectures, movies and recordings to be combined effectively.

d. Place. A room in the neighborhood of a Training library where there is space for books, pamphlets, maps, tape recorders, a movie projector, etc., in either Alcott Hall or the R&S Building. A suitable place would be one which could be visited by uncleared relatives of cleared employees. No classified material will be used in the briefing room.

5. Cautions. A few difficult considerations cannot be safely dodged. One is the hazard of the wife who is an enthusiast, who is too effusive, too thrilled, too expectant. Another is the escapist, who wants to go overseas to get away from the United States and will soon clamor to go elsewhere, or demand to return home. A third is the wife with unsolved personal problems, -- such as so keen a sense of inferiority that she is likely to brag, show off and court notoriety; or cases of obvious

marital difficulties, or extramarital entanglements; or health problems so severe as to be a serious drain on the husband's time and energy. In all such cases, and others like them, the wife should not be sent abroad, and neither should the husband if he cannot detach himself from involvement in his wife's troubles.